

NELAC 7
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We are barely in the first year of NELAP accreditation. Like any startup organization, we are experiencing some of the problems associated with new beginnings. For anyone who expected perfection, I am sorry - but NELAC is run by human beings, and human beings do make errors. But, human beings also know how to learn from their errors to produce a better product. I think we have seen that process at work during NELAC 7. We have seen many proactive measures, both in standards and in activities that make significant progress towards resolving many of the concerns we heard at NELAC 6i.

Our keynote speaker talked about the 5 C's of public policy. All of them, credibility, constituency, compromise, consensus and contingencies are a part of NELAC. I would like you to consider some additional C's:

First of all commitment. This is my challenge to you as individuals and to NELAC as an organization.

We heard Tuesday that EPA has made a five-year monetary commitment to fund NELAC activities. That commitment requires some commitments from us – first to continue efforts to promote, incorporate and implement the principles of PBMS, and secondly to find additional means of supporting NELAC. I feel that we are making progress in both areas, and I hope EPA will be pleased with our efforts.

To the committees: I challenge you to remain committed to being receptive and open to all stakeholder comments and concerns. You may consider something trivial and inconsequential, but if someone has taken the time to express an issue, it is important to them.

We need a commitment from all stakeholders to be open and frank, and let NELAC and NELAP know your concerns. If we don't that a problem exists, how can we work to fix it?

To the accrediting authorities – we need your continued commitment on the resolving inconsistencies. You, as a group, will be implementing many ideas that will promote communication between individual assessors, which will ultimately reduce the numbers of multiple interpretations and help standardize the assessment process. Just a warning to the laboratories – don't expect identical clones – do expect equitable and consistent application of the NELAC Standards.

Finally, to the laboratories - I spoke briefly yesterday about commitment to quality. It is my hope that at some future point, NELAP accreditation is unequivocally equated with excellence and quality. Your laboratories must be willing to implement and always use the quality system outlined in the standards, and to promote a quality culture in all your employees.

The second C? It relates to the first C. Collectively, and individually, we must work together to ensure that NELAC is equated with consistency. Consistency is the key to NELAC's success. Many states are monitoring the successes and problems of the first NELAP Accrediting Authorities. We need to regard comments on inconsistencies seriously, but not personally. It's often hard to accept the fact that something in your organization is not working perfectly, but as long as concerns about consistency exist, something needs to be fixed. We, meaning each of the NELAC organizations must work cooperatively to resolve the immediate problem, and continue to develop proactive measures to avoid the same situation in the future.

My goal this year is to show the nation and the naysayers that NELAC works and the NELAP laboratories are better than your average bear. This can be accomplished with your help and yes, another C, cooperation.

As I attended the standing committee meetings during this past week, it suddenly occurred to me that I recognized more people here at a national meeting than at our last departmental rule workshop. I was both pleased and concerned. Pleased because it means that you have attended enough meetings for me to recognize your face and I am terrible about remembering names and faces. This tells me that you have been involved and are willing to continue to support this process called NELAC. My concern is that NELAC and NELAP are not gaining sufficient recognition to attract additional interested parties. I would like to see more new faces.

So the last C is communication – we know that we hold a viable important niche in environmental decisions. We need to communicate the importance of quality data in making decisions to the data users and to the clients. We also need to emphasize the fact that a quality analysis begins with a representative, quality sample. The engineering and consulting organizations and other individuals or groups that collect samples need to understand the importance of their role, and to become part of the NELAC process. Maybe we need to change the conference name, so that sampling organizations don't automatically assume that NELAC is a lab thing.

I hope all of you leave Salt Lake City with a positive NELAC experience and that each of you return home with the satisfaction of having been a part of the process. You have worked hard, and dedicated many hours to making this program a success. We look forward to hosting NELAC 8 in Florida and I personally hope to welcome all of you and to see many new faces, with different ideas and new perspectives.

Have a safe journey home and let's spread the news – NELAC works, and NELAP means quality.